

John Ed Pearce

Come on, now; let's see that big old smile! That's it! Remember — today is the first day of the rest of your life. And if that isn't enough to make you sick, just remember that today is also the first day of the 12 weeks that have to pass before the weather even begins to resemble spring. Isn't that a happy thought?

And now is the time for happy thoughts. Here is a happy thought: You have 347 days — and nights — before you have to listen again to Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians playing Auld Lang Syne. That should be enough to keep you happy through five days of freezing rain.

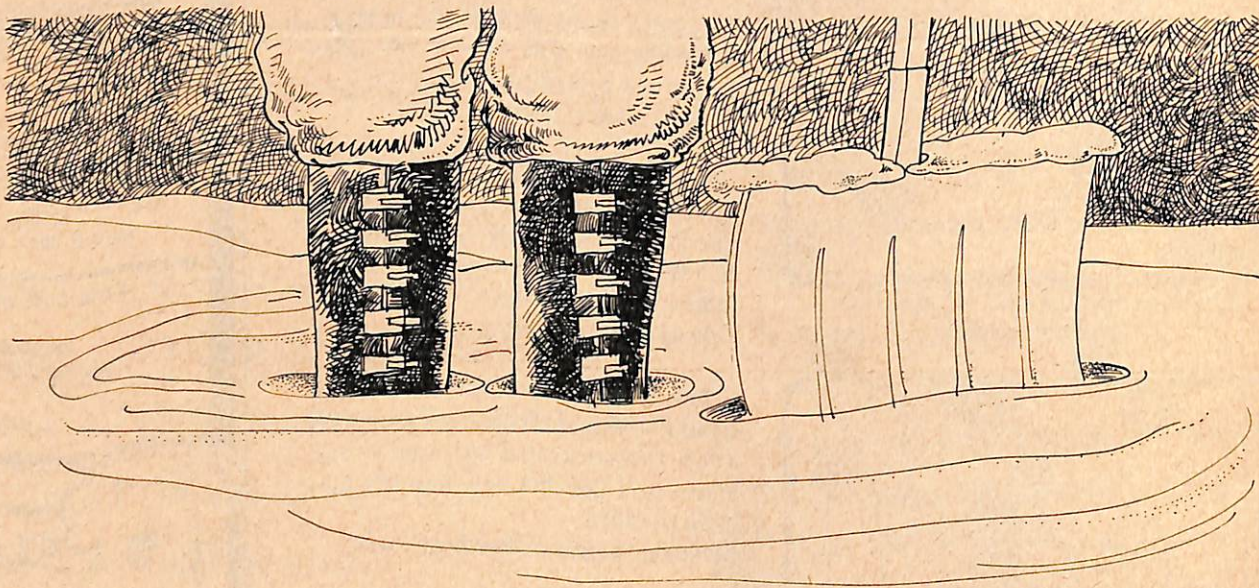
Here's another: It will be 340 days before you have to listen to the kids whining "Don't take down the Christmas tree yet!" There was never a child in this country — maybe in this world — who wanted the Christmas tree taken down before the Fourth of July, just as there was never a Christmas tree that wasn't harder to take down than to put up. Mankind has built vehicles to plumb the universe, but he has never explained how a 100-pound tree can shed 150 pounds of needles while you are taking it out of the living room, to the accompaniment of your wife's comments on your skill.

Here's another to keep you warm when the snowflakes fall: Think of how long it is going to be before you have to go Christmas shopping again; before you have to listen to your sweet little child snarl that that wasn't what he asked for; before you pick up all the boxes and ribbon and torn tissue paper and put them in the garbage, then realize that you have also thrown away five of those little cards on which you had written who sent you what, so that now you cannot thank someone who will from now on consider you an ungrateful oaf.

Polish up that old smile, kid, because you are going to need it.



"Count your blessings. Maybe you can't afford to go out West and ski around in a red and blue suit and make out with a gorgeous person when the lodge fire goes out. On the other hand, you don't break your legs very often in the neighborhood bar."



Herman Wiederwohl

For the next ten weeks you are going to have to put up with people who have just come back from wonderful vacations with gorgeous suntans and hilarious stories of fun things they did, and it is going to burn you up. But don't let it show. Half of them are lying.

What this country needs is a man who comes home from the islands and admits that he spent a bundle, paid twice what the cottage was worth, got rained on every other day and had to stay cooped up with the kids. He does not exist.

Practice that big grin for use when your next-door neighbor starts talking about his insufferable child, who has just made the honor society and the basketball team, has been elected class president, and has written a piece for the high-school paper (of which he

is editor) which has been reprinted in Reader's Digest and gotten him offers from Harvard, Yale and Princeton. You will need the grin, especially when your own oaf comes loping in from school wearing a punk outfit and spike hair.

Be happy! Ahead of you is a jolly time full of icy driveways and sidewalks. The city workers will come and clear the street in the next block. They will not clear yours, and your car will slip and slide around, making you late for work. No one will believe your story about getting stuck on ice. You will write an indignant letter to city hall. You will get a form letter in reply telling you, in effect, that things are tough all over and that the city is broke. You will write an indignant letter to the White House, which will then put your name on a mailing list and you will get a letter asking you to

contribute to George Bush's campaign.

Things may look lousy just now, but consider this: You have more than 12 weeks before you have to pay your income taxes. You may think that Christmas left you envying street people, but just wait. Remember how good King Ron told you that the forms would be simpler and your taxes lighter? Wrong. Good King Ron is also the one who told you he would never have any truck with terrorists. And other fairy tales.

Look on the sunshine side. The weather outside is frightful, but the fire is so delightful. Of course, a lot depends on what kind of fire you have. If you have a wood fire, remember that sparks can pop out and set your house on fire. You won't run this risk if you have a gas stove, but the vent can clog and asphyxiate you. Electric heat

is good and very safe unless you get a short in one of those baseboard heaters, in which case it is always better to trick the dog into touching it first. Of course, electric heat will cost you as much as the house, but as they say, you can't take it with you.

The best thing is a radiator, which contains nothing but hot water. Admittedly, it will dry out your skin, make you look old before your time and cause you to lose your boyfriend to some woman who has just come back from the islands with a gorgeous tan. But a boyfriend who can be lured away with a cheap gimmick like that wasn't worth having, anyhow, was he?

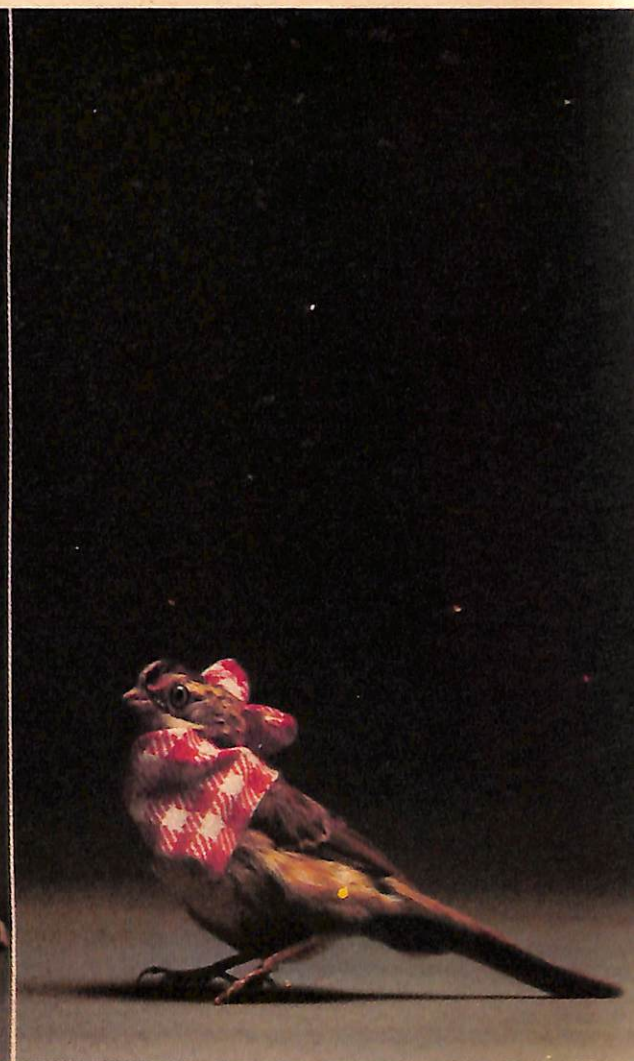
Count your blessings. Maybe you can't afford to go out West and ski around in a red and blue suit and make out with a gorgeous person when the lodge fire goes out. On the other hand, you don't break your legs very often in the neighborhood bar. Soon or late those smug-looking types who rush off to New York for the new plays or museum shows or the fabulous new restaurants are going to get mugged. Kenya is so chic this year that Americans trying to get there almost outnumber the Kenyans trying to get out. But keep in mind that Africa is jumping with AIDS, too.

Sure, it's going to snow. You're going to get snow down your shoe tops, your fingers are going to freeze scraping ice off the car, ice is going to clog the gutters and cause the roof to leak when it thaws, the floors will be cold and the dog won't go out to potty.

But the kids will love it. They will rush out to slide down hills, come in all red and blue and whining with the cold and ten minutes later rush out to play in the snow again.

And it will be pretty. At night the air will be clear, and there will be a wonderful hush about it, and the moon on the snow will sparkle in a world of silver and black, and you will find there is nothing quite like a good fire, a warm drink, a good book and a warm bed. You may even be so captivated by the season that you will lose your mind and voluntarily go outside and crunch around in the snow.

Or, if you can't hack that, just keep in mind: Only 12 weeks till the weather improves. Come on, now; why aren't you smiling? □



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